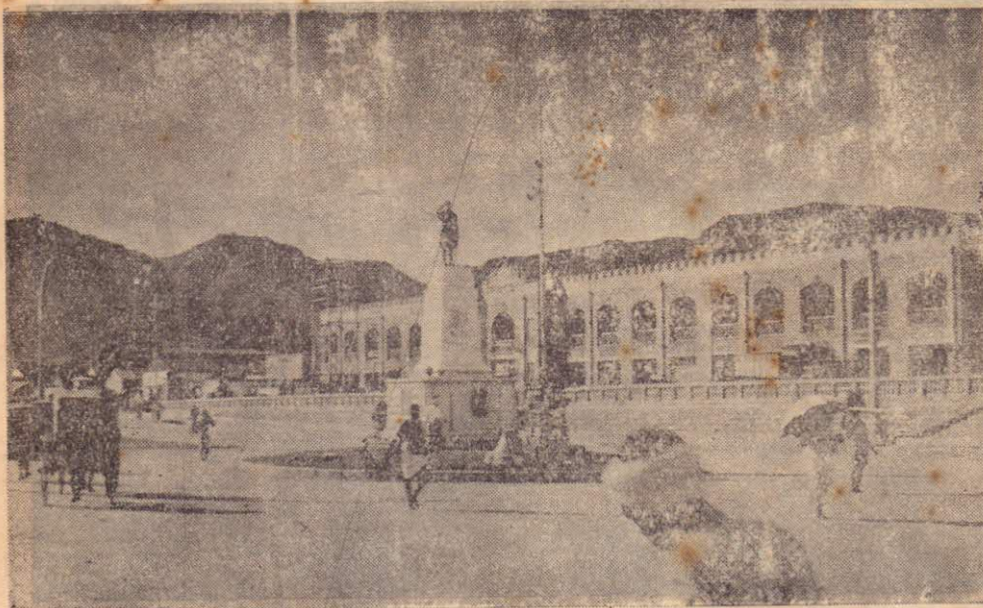




## BEZWADA — A STUDY

By

SRI DIGAVALLI V. SIVA RAO

ADVOCATE

Bezawada is the biggest city of Andhra Desa. It covers an area of about 16 sq. miles and has a population of about a lakh and a half people. The City is constantly growing along the trunk roads, across the canals, and around the hills and the expansion defies all planning. Bezawada is situated on the Northern bank of the river Krishna and is on the convergence of land, water and air routes connecting it with every part of the country.

The river and the canals, the Grand Trunk Road and the Masulipatam Hyderabad Road, the broad and meter gauges of the M. S. M. and N. S. Rly., the Aerodrome at Gannavaram make Bezawada the unofficial metropolis of Andhra Desa. Trade and Commerce, Art and Industry, naturally found their way into the city and numerous business houses, mills and factories industrial and public institutions sprang up in and around Bezawada.

The picturesque perennial river flowing by, the net work of canals passing through, the range of hills encircling the city, make it attractive and





*Bezawada - a View*

beautiful and one only regrets this beautiful setting is not taken full advantage of in building up a city beautiful.

Bezawada is now a rich municipality having a revenue of over 20 lakhs. It has electricity and protected water supply, cement and asphalt roads. It has a Government Hospital and a number of private clinics but sanitation and public health and medical aid cannot be said to be as satisfactory as it ought to be.

The anicut and railway bridge across the river, the thermal station and the Durga hill by its side, the subway and the roundabouts and various buildings and parks attract the eye of the casual visitor.

Cement, Oil, Fruit, Soap and Sugar Industries, The Pharmaceutical Works Rolling Mills and various other factories and mills make Bezawada an Industrial Centre of Andhra Desa.

The S. R. R. College and the High Schools and other Educational institutions, the libraries and clubs, and the numerous talkie houses cater to the educational, cultural and artistic tastes of the people.

#### **"BEZWADA" - "VIJAYAWADA"**

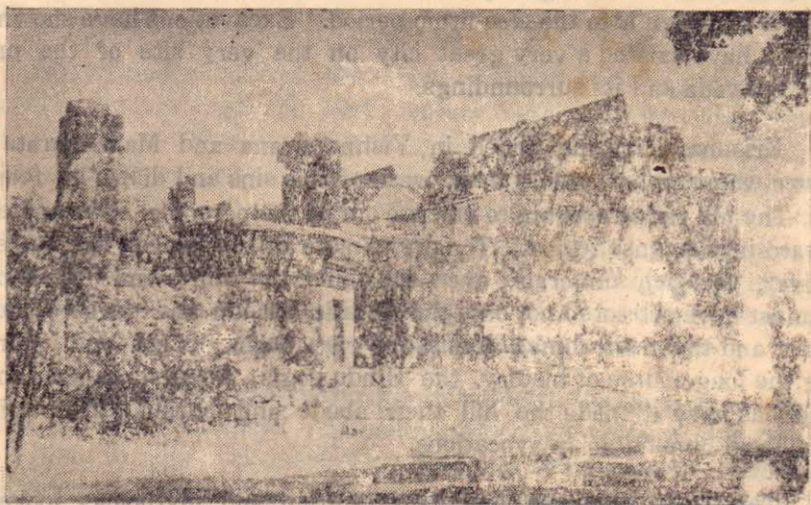
It was thought by some that 'Bezawada' is a corrupt form of the original name Vijayawada and the name was accordingly got changed. But



a reference to ancient inscriptions would show that the place was known as Bezwada for more than 12 centuries.

The Telugu copper plate inscription of King Vishnuvardhana the Third who ruled Andhra Desa between 719 and 755 and the inscriptions of Gunaga Vijayaditya (848-892) Ammaraja II alias Rajamahendra (945-970) and the famous inscription of Yuddhamalla (927-934), all mention the word 'Bezwada' and it could not therefore be a corrupt form used by any foreign rulers. Vijayawada on the other hand appears to be a poetic variant of Bezwada used in literary works.

The meaning and origin of the name Bezwada has been surrounded in mystery. Tradition and mythology have only complicated the matter. But sanskrit scholars are able to give one clue to it. The word "Beeja" in sanskrit means 'Sakti' or Divine Power and if 'Beza' is a corrupt form of Beeja the meaning of Bezwada is clear as the abode of Durga an aspect of Para Sakti. For time immemorial Bezwada has been associated with the ancient shrine of Kanaka Durga on the hill by the side of river Krishna. It has been known as 'Durga Kshetra.' Durga is a manifestation of Parasakti or Divine Power. The idol which symbolises Parasakti on the Durga hill appears to be carved out of the hill rock itself. There are a number of



Kondapalli Khilla

'Yantras' in and around the shrine. The Yantras are mystic symbols used by Sadhakas for invoking the Divine Power. The mandapas, court yards, and other structures are all spread over the hill and its precincts. Gardens and parks belonging to the Shrine surround the hill and the township that has grown around the hill has gradually spread out.



Many stories are told of the powers of the Goddess; of prayers heard, boons granted, riches showered, diseases cured and even dead men called back to life. It is said that the Goddess once showered a rain of gold and has earned for herself the name of Kanaka Durga. It is also said that the course of the river Krishnaveni was once blocked by the hill range on which the shrine stands and it was by a miracle that the hills were broken assunder to allow the river to pass through. Tradition and mythology have it that Indrakila the spirit of the hill range invoked Parasakti and She came down to stay on the hill in the shape of Durga riding a lion with eight hands armed with celestial weapons and spearing down Mahishasura the arch enemy of the human race.

Durga is not a cruel aspect of the Almighty, but a benevolent deity. The tradition is old and the explanation is plausible. It is probable that Bezwada has got its name by its long association with Durga or Sakti.

#### PRE - HISTORY.

Bezwada has both a prehistoric origin and a historic past. A number of antiquities found in and around Bezwada have clearly established the fact that it was one of the centres of the prehistoric man. Discovery of glazed pottery in abundance at Mogalrajapuram a suburb of old Bezwada has made Indologists to assign it to the Neo-lithic period. Excavations have shown that there must have existed a very great city on the very site of the present town of Bezwada and its surroundings.

Krishnaveni is mentioned in Vishnupurana and Mahabharata as a holy river whose waters purify man, wash off his sins and dispel his fears and doubts. The hill range appears to emerge out of the perennial river and extend northward into a dense forest. The dry climate of the place, the waters of the river, the rich minerals over the hills the flora and fauna of the forest must have attracted not only the mystic ascetic and devotee, but the alchemist and the medical man in quest of rare herbs, drugs and chemicals. During the long course of history, the Hindu yogis, Buddhist monks and the Jain siddhas have all made the hill their abode and pursued their spiritual, scientific and humanitarian avocations.

The Hindu Buddhist and Jain tradition and mythology spoke of a Spirit of the Hill and the miracles that have occurred to break the range of hills to allow the river to pass through them and no wonder the common man looked at the river and hill in reverence and worshipped the Spirit. Huan-Tsang the famous Chinese traveller who visited the place in 639 A. D. spoke of the tradition of the Spirit of the Hill and an Andhra King having bored a hole in the hill to enable the river to pass through.



### THE BUDDHIST PERIOD.

Coming down to historical times, the discovery of coins of Satavahana kings in and around Bezwada and a Roman coin having actually been picked up there by Mr. Rea in 1888, clearly show that trade and commerce flourished in and around Bezwada even by the beginning of the Christian era.

The Satavahanas ruled Andhra Desa for four and a half centuries from the 3rd century B. C. with Dhanakataka in Guntur District as their capital. They patronised Buddhism. Buddhist Viharas, Chaityas and Stupas sprang up throughout the country specially along the course of the Krishna river. Trade and commerce flourished. Srikakulam, Hamsaladivi, Ghantasala, Gudivada, Bezwada, Jaggayapeta, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Srisaillam were some of the important centres of Buddhist religion, culture and trade and commerce. Every Buddhist vihara and Chaitya was a monastery and a university, where arts and sciences were taught to hundreds of students. They were also charitable institutions where the poor were sheltered and patients were treated. Medicine was practised by the Buddhist monks on a large scale. Lists of herbs, drugs and medicines known to the Buddhist monks have been mentioned in inscriptions and literary works. The Jain Saivite and Vishnavite temples and maths of later times imitated the Buddhist monasteries, established charitable institutions and carried on educational and humanitarian work.

Nagarjunakonda was the most famous Buddhist monastery that flourished in Andhra Desa the first century before Christ. Nagarjuna the famous founder of Mahayana School of Buddhism and great scholar and scientist was the head of that University. People from all over the country and even from Tibet China and other foreign countries flocked to the University. Trade and commerce flourished. There is evidence to suppose that sea-going ships came up the river Krishna as far as Nagarjunakonda. The religious, cultural and Commercial contacts of those times were largely shared by Bezwada and other places on the banks of the river.

During the next few centuries after Christ, Bezwada grew in importance as a Buddhist centre. Numerous Buddhist remains and the caves of the Vishnu Kundin period (350-610) show that Bezwada was a religious and cultural centre of those times. If Bezwada has been a great centre of Hindu and Buddhist religion for some centuries, it has no less been an important centre of Jain religion also.

### THE PERIOD OF JAINISM.

Jainism began to spread in Andhra Desa before the Christian era and continued to flourish till 1200 A. D. There are Jain remains all over the Andhra country and Sewell's Topographical lists of antiquities in Madras



Presidency show the existence of Jain antiquities in the Krishna District and in and around Bezwada also.

The Jains did not reject the indigenous religions and social observances but supplemented them. They accepted the caste system. They had their own sects and sub-sects. They worshiped twentyfour Thirthankaras as manifestation of Purusha and the Sasana Devis as aspects of Sakti. They had symbols similar to those of the Vedic Gods. Their temples are called Vasathis or Basthis. These temples were situated in the most busy part of the towns and the word Basthi has come to mean in Telugu as the busy part of the town. Thus the old town of Bezwada is often referred to as 'Bezwada Basti'. Jainism had been very popular both in Andhra Desa and Tamilnad, and Jains had a net work of temples and Maths. The Jain Math at Kanchipuram has been very famous for its Jain scholars and flourished for many centuries. The copper plate inscription of Vishnuvardhana the third who ruled Andhra Desa between 715 and 755 A. D. refer to a Jain Math in Bezwada called "Nadumbi Vasathi". The tamil word Nadumbi means middle and it is obvious that the Jain math at Bezwada was an intermediate link in the chain of Jain maths of those times. The inscription mentions the names of eight generations of the heads of the math and this indicates the existence of the math for about three centuries. Some of the Acharyas were Raja gurus. Kalibhadracharya was the then head and he was a famous scholar. The inscription mentions that a sect of Jain Sanyasis called the Kavaruri gana or Surastha Gana inhabited the Math. It refers to a village having been granted for the worship of Thirthankara. The Masulipatam inscription of Ammaraja the second also known as Rajamahendra who ruled between 945-970 also refers to the building of two Jaina Bhavanas in Bezwada and a village being granted for the same.

It is thus clear that Bezwada was an important centre of Jain religion and culture for some centuries.

### AGGRESSIVE SAIVISM

Jainism was at its zenith in the thirteenth century when a great calamity befell it. The Kakatiya kings who ruled at Warangal became staunch Saivites and were opposed to Jainism. They brought the entire Andhra Desa under their sway and ruthlessly suppressed Jainism. Jain temples and Maths were destroyed and Jains were either killed or they committed suicide. Jain literature was destroyed. Many Jain temples were converted into Saivite temples. The worship of Siva and Sakthi was once more established throughout the length and breadth of Andhra Desa. The worship of Mallikarjuna and Kanaka Durga of Bezwada became as popular as that of Mallikarjuna at Sri Sailam. Brahmotsavas were performed on a grand scale and rich endowments appear to have been made by kings, chieftains and even common people. Many fertile lands and gardens in and around Bezwada and in the villages of

the District are still known as 'Durga manyams' thus indicating that they were originally endowed for the worship of the deity.

An inscription of Emperor Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagara found near the temple shows that he visited the Durga Shrine at Bezwada more than once and has also made endowments. Akkanna and Madanna of Golconda fame are said to have built a hall in honour of the Goddess.

The French traveller Tavernier who passed through Bezwada in the seventeenth century has described the shrine and the structures at great length. Bezwada has since been visited by many Europeans who have left their impression of it as a prosperous little town.

In spite of the many ups and downs in history through which it has passed Bezwada has been going strong and promises to be the most important city of the Andhra State of the future.